
Appendix A
Centralized Command Selection Paper
30 March 1973*

* Appendix A has been retyped. However, it retains the spelling, punctuation, and style of the original.

30 March 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR COL TIXIER

SUBJECT: OPMS Command Selection and Selection of District Engineers

1. The purpose of this memo is to set down my thoughts on the selection process for commanders and District Engineers—ideas that I have recently discussed with LTC Supplizio of the OPMS Study Group. I will do this by first providing in rough essay form my thoughts and follow this with a statement of options and advantages and disadvantages. Lack of time does not permit boiling it down to study format without important omissions.
2. OPMS Command Selection - the first year. The Combat Support Army Command Selection Board picked good officers for command this next year as can be expected. In failing to return to Colonels Division a longer list as we had requested (25), the board has limited assignment flexibility. At present the entire list of 12 has been exhausted—with three deferees, seven engineer commands, one aviation command and one support command commander, all alternates have been used. With possibilities for general officer selections, selection for key horseholder positions, and relief for cause or sickness, future boards should provide a larger number as was done for Artillery and Signal this year—we can still draw the line for principal and alternates at the appropriate points.
3. Impact of this year's OPMS command selection. Before board results were known, the Chief of Engineers determined that he would support OPMS fully. He determined that District Engineers completing two years would go to command—he would request that any District Engineer who would be completing but one year in a District be deferred a year. This resulted in three officers leaving their Districts after two years, with two officers, having served only one year being deferred for command until FY 75. One other officer, slated to be Regt Cmdr at USMA next year was also deferred. With but few available commands, the impact has been considerable. It meant increased turbulence this year as three District Engineers left early. For next year, it means that we already know that two District Engineers will leave after two years, and three of the five FY 75 command positions are taken by this year's deferees. Therefore, only two command positions will be open for new selectees next year.
4. Philosophy - Engineer Colonels, Troop Command, District Engineers. Like an officer of any other branch, an engineer officer worth his salt aspires to command. Within the Corps, for colonels that command is perceived as engineer troop command or engineer district command. This may not be fully understood by the combat arms officer who would view a district engineer—a civil function—as management or a technician's job. But the relation of the two and the perception of engineer officers is real and valid. It is valid because engineer districts really are command—requiring the same principles of leadership and management as does a troop command. A district is an operating element in a chain of command, reporting through engineer divisions to the Office, Chief of Engineers. It has subordinate operating elements and the district engineer has a staff to assist him. He is concerned with operations, planning, preparing resources, men, materiel, money and time to

accomplish missions. He must lead and motivate—different personalities require different techniques just as in troop units. He must handle the personnel problems of his command and since it consists of the whole spectrum from the lowest grade of wage-board employee to GS-15, this means: he is concerned with replacements and timing; he has discipline problems; equal opportunity problems, and congressionals; he is expected to produce results—through his operating elements, using his staff, and his own qualities of leadership. It is his command and he is responsible for the whole of it—he cannot delegate his responsibility. This doesn't establish that districts should or are perceived to rate a priority over troop command—there are large and small districts, more and less challenging and more or less desirable just as there are more and less challenging commands—e.g., an engineer bde in USAREUR with five combat battalions compared to an engineer group of one battalion at Ft. Riley.

5. The relationship is valid from the standpoint of force structure and offers professional development as well. In time of peace the Army logically seeks to retain the highest possible percentage of its combat forces in the residual force structure. Headquarters are opportune items for deletion. The few residual engineer battalions are spread about CONUS with little need for Engineer Group headquarters to pull together their efforts. As a consequence the Engineer troop unit structure is truncated at the top. That gap in command experience historically has been adequately filled by the engineer district. It provides the opportunity for the Army to train officer who can command the combat groups and brigades in an expanded wartime forces. It provides the opportunity for all engineer officers to see command running from platoon to company to battalion to group/district.

6. Alternatives for selecting troop commanders and district engineers.

a. Alternative I - Board selection of troop commander with District Engineers selected by the Chief of Engineers in a slating session for OPD. (Present System)

Advantages:

- (1) Chief of Engineers has maximum flexibility in selecting of District Engineers.
- (2) Eliminates possibility of board having more than a single set of selection criteria. (Assumes there would be different criteria. Present COE indicates he is looking for same criteria.)
- (3) Maintains a clear-cut distinction of troop command. (Assumes such distinction is desirable.)

Disadvantages:

- (1) Carries "halo" effect for engineers since there are so few positions.
- (2) Establishes District Engineer position as second class—not equivalent to troop command.

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- (3) Increases assignment turbulence by permitting premature rotation of officers from District Engineer positions for troop command.

b. Alternative II - Troop command selection board selects District Engineers with troop commanders on a single list.

Advantages:

- (1) District Engineer and Troop Command are recognized colonel commands.
- (2) Eliminates “halo” effect of few engineer command selectees.
- (3) Provides board credibility to selection process.
- (4) Permits engineer colonels to indicate an honest preference for district or troop command (not the experience this year).
- (5) Precludes premature rotation of officers from district engineer positions to troop command.

Disadvantages:

- (1) Precludes dual assignment of an officer as a District Engineer and Troop commander.
- (2) Could complicate eligibility and selection criteria (assumes there would be different criteria).
- (3) Clouds Army-wide clear-cut distinction of troop command. (Assumes distinction is desirable.)

c. Alternative III - Troop Command Selection Board selects separate lists of officers for troop command and for District Engineers.

Advantages:

Same as for Alternative II.

Disadvantages:

- (1) Could complicate eligibility and selection criteria (assumes there would be different criteria).
- (2) Clouds Army-wide clear-cut distinction of troop command. (Assumes distinction is desirable.)
- (3) Limits OPD assignment flexibility unnecessarily.

d. Alternative IV - Troop Commanders and District Engineers selected by independent boards.

Advantages:

- (1) Each board considers single set of criteria.
- (2) Improves visibility of district engineer positions in Army.
- (3) Provides board creditability to each selection.

Disadvantages:

- (1) Does not remove 2d class no-command stigma from District Engineers.
- (2) Creates “3d Class” citizens.
- (3) Complicates overall selection process—which board meets first?
- (4) Restricts assignment flexibility unnecessarily.
- (5) Requires another board.

7. Analysis of above factors.

a. Selection Criteria. The subject of different eligibility and selection criteria addressed in advantages and disadvantages assumes there will be different criteria. The current Chief of Engineers told the OPMS steering group that he was looking for the same type leader for district engineer as desired for troop commander. Considering the discussion in paragraph 4 above this appears valid—for an engineer the progression in command is platoon - company, battalion, and the group/district. For each of the latter two, the primary prerequisite is successful demonstration of performance in command.

b. “Maintain a clear cut distinction of troop command.” Apparently other command names on branch list from one board should not abuse the distinction. That distinction is set out by the adjective “troop.” District engineers are not troop commanders. Although some troop commands have more troops than some engineer districts. A common board list is adjusting OPMS command selection procedures to the peculiarities of a single branch. I believe that OPMS should be so adaptable to be right for any branch.

c. “Increases assignment turbulence by permitting premature rotation of officers from District Engineer positions to troop command.” This can be taken care of by other modifications to current procedures,—by increasing the year span of consideration and by permitting up to two year deferment. Both of these might contradict other objectives of the selection system.

d. Alternative II - “Permits Engineer colonels to indicate a preference for district or troop command.” —In answer to the 6 July 1972 message many colonels commented to me they preferred

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district assignment (because they perceived it is a tougher more demanding position than troop commands) to command but felt they had to opt for troop command. Likewise other colonels told me at this fall's slating session they preferred a troop command to a District. With this situation an officer really desiring a District may go to troop command thereby depriving another well qualified officer of his preference as well. It happened this year. This is aggravated by the extremely small number of command opportunities in the Corps of Engineers compared to other branches.

e. The "halo" effect—this is a problem in any branch but this is aggravated for engineers. There are so few positions that they equate roughly with the number of engineer general officers that might be chosen in any year. The existence of another demanding, quality position (district engineer) fed by the same manpower resources provides further artificial inequalities and perceptions affecting selection. For instance, roughly 5-6 troop command positions will be filled yearly along with 12-14 district engineer positions. Experience would also indicate roughly 4-5 engineer colonels would be selected for general officer as well. Thus roughly 20 engineer colonels are really competitive for general officer each year. Selection of six from a set of 20 with a previous board sort of five to six in that sort provides a ready environment for the "halo" effect. By selecting a larger set for command, 17-18 for district engineers and troop commanders, the two sets become more alike and the "halo" effect will be less likely to occur or be perceived.

f. Alternatives III and IV can be disposed of quickly. Both provide no further advantage than Alternative II and further complicates OPD assignments by designating officers for specific assignment. In addition, Alternative IV requires still another board.

8. If board selection for engineer troop commanders is valid, it would appear that it would be valid as well for district engineers. The final decision between the remaining alternatives and board selection of both district engineers appears to rest on three items —

a. Can the Chief of Engineers live with his loss of flexibility? Would year group and single command opportunity be a hindrance? If a longer eligibility span (3 - 5 years) is approved thereby permitting longer deferments and the ability to use officers in both positions—would this be more in keeping with his needs?

b. Are eligibility and selection criteria compatible in relation to available engineer colonels?

c. Is OPMS adaptable to meet branch differences?

9. In summary I would re-emphasize the following points. I don't see District Engineer selection by a central board as deprecating troop command in the engineers or the Army. A district is not "troop" command but it is command. The elimination of Commander "shopping lists" has been a driving force behind centralized troop command selection. This is not such a severe problem in engineers as it is for other combat arms officers since engineer troop commands are spread thinly and engineer districts provide the alternate high visibility assignment. Consequently I see no real drive to cause engineer troop commanders to be centrally selected but to provide board credibility to the selection process. In that case the same argument would prompt me to believe it would be valid for district engineer selection. So my preference would be to see the OPMS system show its adaptability by

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providing a board creditable list to OPD from which assignments would be made to both District and Command positions. It is more credible and provides a system very close to that in the past. Further I would seek a four-year period for consideration thus permitting greater stability in assignments—another of today's goals. I think the question of length of eligibility for selection needs to be answered first—then redirect the question to the Chief of Engineers.

RICHARD S. KEM
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